

A user's guide to the Heinz Archive and Library

It may be assumed the Gallery's Heinz Archive and Library Public Study Room is for specialists only. Actually, as part of a national institution, its mandate is to welcome all with a declared interest in portraiture; interested persons who, after registration, are given the resources to pursue self-directed study in the Library.

The Public Study Room is organised for public use. Located in Orange Street, just behind the Gallery, it is furnished with stacks lined with green, red and brown boxes holding thousands of images. It accommodates around five researchers at a time. About half the material is in the PSR, mainly on open access; the rest is stored on site and can be called up on the day. To appreciate the range of resources visit <https://www.npg.org.uk/research/archive/>

Do not be put off by the registration formalities; the sheet of dos and don'ts handed out on arrival. They are designed to preserve the Collection and to comply with current Copyright and Data Protection regulations.

In the case of a first visit please telephone or email to book, giving the topic of research; on arrival you will need to show some form of ID (passport or driver's licence) and to fill in an Access Agreement Form. In any case you will be most welcome.

The Archive and Library is open by appointment only

Tuesday – Thursday 10.00-17.00

020 7321 6617

(Type Talk: 18001)

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Items from the collections can be ordered ahead of your visit using the online Archive catalogue and online Library catalogue:

<http://archivecatalogue.npg.org.uk/CalmView/>

<https://librarycatalogue.npg.org.uk/N10317UK/OPAC/Index.aspx>

Researching portraits at the Heinz Archive and Library

a) Preparing your visit

Before the visit, spend time exploring the Gallery's website and test your topic in the 'Search' facility <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections>: nine times out of ten you will strike gold. You may then want to widen the search beyond items in the NPG Collection: this is when a visit to the Library becomes relevant. Say, for example, the portrait you are investigating is named but unsigned (or the other way round) or you are curious about the caricatures of X, medallic portraiture of Y, cartes-de-visite of Z; or you wish to explore artist self-portraits for an educational project, images for a biography ... living artists for a portrait commission ... royal caricatures ... 1970s pop musicians ... photographic studios and so on. Material on a vast range of portrait-related topics may be discovered at the Library.

b) The Archive & Library

After registration you will be shown the prime resources including:

- Green **Sitter Boxes** arranged alphabetically by name of sitter. These contain auction catalogue illustrations, engravings, photographs, and other reproductions of portraits.

- **Red Artist Boxes**, also containing auction catalogue illustrations, engravings, photographs, and other reproductions of portraits. The files are divided by medium, subdivided into quarter-century and arranged alphabetically by name of artist. You can search to see if an artist has a file, and if so where this is shelved, using the online library catalogue <https://librarycatalogue.npg.org.uk/N10317UK/OPAC/Index.aspx> Simply enter the artist's name and the phrase 'artist box' and find out.
- **Reference books** on open access shelves. A good starting point is to check your subject's name in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB). This invaluable resource, useful for both sitters and portrait makers, can be accessed at the Library in book form and online (and also via many UK public libraries). The ODNB comprises over 60,000 biographical articles of the people - not all British - who shaped British history. The articles reference the subject's portraits and many are illustrated.
- A wide range of **artist reference books** including *The Dictionary of Art*; *Royal Academy of Arts Exhibitors 1769-1970*; *Dictionary of British Portraiture, 1979-81*; early art sale catalogues; artist biographies and reference books and journals on all areas of portrait production.
- **Index slips**, paper slips arranged alphabetically by sitter name, containing references to portraits either illustrated or recorded in publications held by the Library or available elsewhere.
- Green **Costume Boxes** containing images of portraits arranged chronologically by decade. See also the Library's reference books on Costume.
- Brown **Types Boxes** arranged by type of portrait, including professions (e.g. legal, military, political) and subjects (e.g. allegorical, children, family groups); containing auction catalogue illustrations, engravings, photographs.
- **'Notes files'**: primarily designed for Gallery staff these include Notes on Sitters, Notes on Artists, and Notes on Collections. They contain correspondence, notes and cuttings, and potentially sensitive information about portraits not held by the Gallery. Many of the files have been redacted for consultation by visitors, to respect Data Protection law. Not all of these have been catalogued but you can search the online Archive catalogue to see if your sitter or artist has a file <http://archivecatalogue.npg.org.uk/CalmView/>
- **'Registered Packets'**: these files contain records about the portraits in the Gallery's Primary Collection. They vary in scope and content but routinely contain documentation covering the acquisition and conservation of these works. You can search the online Archive catalogue using the name of the sitter or artist for the Primary Collection work, or using the portrait number e.g. '4031' to find the file for portrait NPG 4031 <http://archivecatalogue.npg.org.uk/CalmView/>

c) Sample research case studies

- Sir Winston Churchill

You have a small plaster bust of Churchill inscribed 'Nemon' and want to know more. First take photos of it from every angle. At the NPG, Library staff will direct you to the Winston Churchill **Sitter Boxes**, seven in total with one dedicated to the sculpted portraits. Inside the box the files are arranged alphabetically by artist; the file on portraits of Churchill by the sculptor Oscar Nemon reveals that Churchill sat to him over many years; saleroom catalogue cuttings reveal busts similar to yours, with sale estimates and historical information. Interested, you decide to check Nemon's own **Sitter Box**. Amazingly, it opens to a bust of Nemon *by* Churchill, in

fact Churchill's sole experiment in portrait sculpture. Intrigued, you look up Oscar Nemon, this time in the **Artist Box** sequence, to see where your bust falls within his production span. Library staff suggest you could press further and check exhibition catalogues on Churchill and on Nemon, and biographical material and library index slips for those names. You plan to return.

- Florence Nightingale

A £10 bank note that went out of circulation in 1994 bears an engraved figure of Florence Nightingale on the reverse. Curious, you check the *NPG Later Victorian Portraits* online catalogue for images of Nightingale <https://www.npg.org.uk/research/programmes/late-victorian-catalogue/late-victorian-portraits-search/> and discover the bank note image to be a blend of two photographs of the 1850s. Intrigued, you book an appointment at the PSR. Here, bank note in hand, leafing through the Florence Nightingale **Sitter Box**, the complexity is apparent – how many similar images, different dates and attributions. But you also discover there are 15 vintage photographs of Nightingale in the Gallery's Collection, and arrange to view these.

d) Tips for researching unnamed or unsigned portraits

Before any visit to the Heinz Archive and Library do preparatory research using the Gallery's website.

Build a research file; record when and where your item was acquired; if framed, photograph any labels and inscriptions front and back; measure the object and check the medium and support. Magnifiers and torchlights are helpful.

Researching a portrait involves questioning existing information, such as it might be, and tying in fresh documentation. If the portrait lacks a sitter/maker's name, you are unlikely to make a definitive breakthrough even in such a specialized resource centre. But with careful use of comparative material and reference books you can progress the assessment.

Inscriptions may be forged, dates may be wrong ... question the evidence. You need a *cluster* of information to make connexions between such a portrait, period, school or artist.

Common names always take longer to check than unusual ones, so 'T. Tugendhat' will be quicker than 'T. Turner' because there will be more Turners to look through in the **Sitter Boxes**.

In historical portraiture male figures are relatively easier to research: there are clues in the composition to their professions (uniform, attributes) and status and, if significant, the portrait may have been copied, engraved or photographed, and these can be traced. The **Type Boxes** can be helpful too: if you want to find out more about a print of (say) an anonymous C.19 pugilist, try the Type Box 'Sports and Pastimes / Boxing'. Checking historical portraits of unidentified women by unidentified artists is often harder; such figures must be judged on their costumes, hairstyle, attributes etc., for which there are reference books; the **Costume Boxes** (men and women, chronologically arranged) can be useful here too.

If there are even slight reasons to connect the subject with a particular artist, head directly for the relevant name in the **Artist Boxes** sequence.

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